


A U B A D E



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A U B A D E

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A U B A D E

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Pula
For My Brother & Sister

by Andrea Hoover

When it rained, blue-throated lizards would fall
through the thorn-tree straight into our deep-end then
flail, flounder and drown. Fascinated, we'd
shout as we dashed back and forth, watching their
bubbles rise and pop with a whisper . . .
After lunch there'd be a rainbow and under
sister's supervision we'd count
and collect the blue, bloated bodies floating
towards the filter.

Once, one dropped on my brother as he lounged
like a lion, in his pool-chair.
There was the sharp, wet slap of a frog's belly on
concrete as the aqua-topped reptile
made moist contact with my young sibling's face.
The claws sank in and the shrieks began as
we coached from the tiles and advised him to dive.
Instead though, he flicked at it with
water-logged fingers as we watched in amusement.

A short pause followed soon thereafter
when I thought Mambas could crawl through keyholes.
For hours I'd imagine their dark, serpent-shines
shooting like airborne molasses from under the doorknob.
All night long I'd lay with cold, clammy hands
clenched under my chin, and wonder
why sleep had skipped my room again.

And then one winter we walked to the dam
where the foam on the cattails could kill on contact.
We dug through the clay in search of bullets
left by hunters who'd shot all the hippos;
leaving the water so red and still
that curious, we bent over the reservoir
to peer through the mirror that
reflected their death.

After our walk we were quiet for days,
rarely smiled, and ate very little.
I don't remember why, though.



Michael W. Morgan
Mixed Media

The Baby Room

by Maggie Bassen

Sometimes on Sundays
our dad would take us to his office
so that our mom could have some time to herself.
We would all wear flannel shirts and jeans
and he would tell us to go to the bathroom before we left
so we wouldn't bug him while he was working.
We would fill our pockets with Kiddles
and Cassie would always try to bring something too big
like the whole Barbie Vacation Van
and would cry when Dad told her she couldn't.

So we'd all go
and we'd have the Free to Be You and Me tape on in the car.
When we'd get there
our dad would use his special card to open the door
and he'd put his name in the book
and take his white coat off the rack and put it on.
He'd bring us to the room that had that white kind of
blackboard that you wrote on with magic markers
and a big long table with chairs all around it
and he'd tell us to stay there until he was done
then he'd take us to the baby room.

We would draw on the board--
really big things to try to fill it up--
and play hangman.
We would spin on the chairs
and play with our dolls.
Right after it started getting boring
he'd come back without his white coat
and we'd have to erase the whole board
and put the chairs back around the table.
We'd try to get all the Kiddles
but sometimes we'd forget one
and he would have to bring it home Monday night.
Then we'd go down the hall
to look at the babies.

You couldn't tell what the really little one were,
floating in those big jars of water.
He told us they were babies--
each one was a month older
until the last one was a real baby,
except with that cord still on and curled up in a ball.

Those jars were lined up all in a row
with special lights underneath that we weren't supposed to turn on.
Their heads were really big, mostly,
and some were sucking their thumbs.

I would ask could we take one out and hold it
but he always said no,
they were just to look at.
Then it would be time to go and we'd shut off the light
so the babies could go back to sleep.
On the ride home I would think about my plan--
how I would sneak in there sometime
(I didn't really know how, but I'd figure it out)
and open up the jars, wake up the babies, and take them out to play.



Rosita
Linda DiLorenzo
Etching

Marin's Candle

by Jody L. M. Hobbs

Marin's dream fairy told her that if she ever lit the candle at her bedside, then the world would begin to spin just a bit more quickly, and all the criminals would fly out into space. Marin began to dream about criminals then, in all shapes and sizes: pale criminals dressed in sandy shades wandering the beaches with bloodless, chalky skin; night stalkers all in black with faces, as shadowed as the sea at midnight. These shrouded figures stole from children in her dreams and assaulted unsuspecting figures who might have been laughing only seconds before. They walked with narrowed eyes focusing on destinations. They did not relax; they never experienced peace.

Marin awakened with a start and a scream to find her father by her side. She did not bother to question where he had been when she had fallen asleep, with criminals crawling through her senses in the form of raspy winds rapping the shudders outside. Instead, Marin allowed his gentle caresses to soothe her. He sat close, maybe too close, but her nightmares melted with the night.

Tonight, Marin's dream fairy reminded her of her candle's power. Marin glared through foggy eyes at her dream fairy. Again criminals muddled her dreams. They were fighting and bleeding and stealing. They stole bread from families on Pomeroy Street, where houses looked like shoeboxes, and the children dressed drably and gazed from large hungry eyes. The criminals stole Marin's teddybear, Patrick, and they tore him limb from limb while she watched. The criminals laughed until Marin awoke to hollow dark.

Her frightened scream, which had awakened her, lingered around Marin until the heavy footfalls of her approaching father smothered it. She reminded herself

that she was glad he was coming to her as her muscles tensed at his sudden noise. She forced her trembling to stop. He sat at her bedside stroking her hands. "Are you afraid, Marin? Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. There's nothing to be afraid of." And dawn disbursed the darkness into shadows. Marin wondered how much time her father spent with her that night. Did she miss him?

Tonight the dream fairy asked Marin if she liked the criminals. Did she want them to stay? To hurt her? Tonight the criminals kidnapped Marin in her dreams. They kept her in a box, a candle beside her. At night they crept in beside her. Sometimes they held her too closely and stayed all night. She saw their teeth shine when they smiled. She felt the heat of their breath.

The air was hot when she awakened. She felt like she was in a box. Her small heart raced with rapid beats, quickening at the sound of footsteps. Daddy? she wondered. She pulled blankets close around her neck. She could not tell if her father was coming to her or not. She shook with her nightmares, anxious for light to dilute the figures lurking in her mind. Daddy? Is it Daddy? It could be the criminals, the dream fairy said. Marin leaned toward the night table. She heard a criminal laugh in her mind. Or was it in the hallway? Coming nearer? Sitting beside her? Showing his teeth?

Marin lit the candle. It drew a yellow halo around itself and threw the darkness aside. Marin had time enough to recognize her father's weathered smile and outstretched hand before he flew out the window into the sky, which tinged at the edges with dawn.



Geoff Wycoff
Photograph

by Mary Anthony

I feel your rejection in my blood
diseased, it crawls and grasps spreading throughout
it sickens in my veins
I'm weak and cannot stand

I bend back for the bloodletting
to purge you from my body

safely dead.



Verschmutz
Russ Moeller
Photograph

Eng on the Death of Chang, 1874

by Nicola Mason

“Chang’s death was so quiet it did not awaken Eng . . . Later Eng awakened and asked his son, ‘How is your Uncle Chang?’

The boy said, ‘Uncle Chang is cold--Uncle Chang is dead.’

When Eng’s wife entered the room, he began crying out to her: ‘My last hour is come . . . I am dying.’”

American Heritage, August 1962

You have done it now, my brother,
What none of the others could
With their poking and prodding.
You have severed this bond of liver and blood
That I have wished to tear from my chest
Times you leaned heavy on me drunk
Or lay ill and trembling when I was strong.

It wasn’t always so. In Siam,
Swimming in the cold, clear waters
Your closeness warmed me
As we darted about like some slick
Amphibious animal.
And displayed before the rough masses
It eased me to know we could not
Be wrenched apart and lost.

Now I am the warm one in this terrible bed.
Was it tonight we sat before the fire
And I listened to your gravelly breath,
The same I’ve heard in my ear, harsh
Those nights I lay with my wife
Thinking a sharp knife between us
Might end her stoicism.

But now we are done with talk
Of glinting instruments and searing red wires.
This vast act of your heart
Has carried our options to mootness,
And my own heart ceases its pulse,
For I find my longing and fear the same:
Singleness, and your coldness, terrifies me.

Anaesthesia

by Genine Lentine

Walking by the shimmering
ice-laminated trees,
past the dazed gull
who too late apprehended
his own unrippled reflection,
by the iced sclerotic,
his gaze dulled
to the steel glaze
of his wheelchair,
our feet could not feel
the ground through layers
of heat and cold.

We shared one glove,
knit loosely
from the wool of a cobalt lamb.
Turning attention to distance,
you riddled the visible silence
of your breath with words of departure
that, once spoken,
froze into glaciers
moving slowly, collecting,
like dread,
which not even spring
for all its green assurance
would have the force to thaw.



Mindy Culver
Enhanced Photocopy

Greyhound Vacancies

by Andrea Hoover

My eyes wander as I board--Safe, Reliable,
And oh-so Courteous
Yes, but can he work the microphone?
I stoop to retrieve a map to somewhere
He smiles his thanks and drops it again
Must be a play to get the ladies
Shouldn't he ask, "Smoking or non-smoking, miss?"
Or is that just on the airplanes?

I ooze down next to a dozing geriatric
"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you..."
The whites of her eyes glow yellow
"Awfully crowded, don't you think?"
I ask her jaundice-gaze
"Lordy, child, what chou talkin' 'bout?"
She fans herself with brown, cracked hands and coughs
"It's eighty-nine degrees out there, Ma'am"
I point at the blinking neon
But she can't see that far
The light turns green and again she snoozes
I sigh

Sleeping, she stares through yellow slits
It scares me
"Restroom equipped for our convenience--
I'm sure glad I brought this toilet paper"
I say, more to myself than anyone
"What'sa matter, honey, dont'cha like them
Square things they got in th' rear?"
She points behind us with an ebony thumb
I roll my eyes, shake my head, and stuff the tissues
Back in my carry-on for later
"Ooooweee, chile I bet you ain't never even tried 'em . . .
Mos' a time I even snatch some f'my gran'babies."
"You don't say . . ."
"They's who I's goin t' see."
The thought lulls her back to easy slumbers
All of a sudden she looks half her age
And not the least bit frightening
"Folks, you can cut the air on now"
Crackles the microphone
I wrestle with the nozzle

Gluteus flexed, I stretch and snap the light on
Then off I slap it--quick as a flash
I'd rather not see the smears on the window
Back crawls my night vision and I see curly hairs
On the head rest in front of me
I don't even wonder how they got there
Or who they fell from
I glance down at her in the shadows
She still looks . . .no, she looks older now
Moonlight through tinted glass does not flatter

I watch cans roll up and down the aisle
Small hands dart forth to capture them
Leaning forward, I groan
In the darkness, two feet planted firmly on my pack
No wonder she's smiling
I rise slowly and face the vacancy
Lead in my limbs
Dread in my eyes, I go
There, I hold my breath and enter bravely
As I place them, paper squares slide from the seat
And stick to the floor
Someone knocks--I yell
"It's occupied, can't you read"
Oh, for crying out loud
Defeated, I sit
Paranoid, I stand
Lord only knows who sat here last

Leaving it vacant I lurch, lungs bursting
I find my place and sit harder than steel
Her yellowed whites smile
"You'll be fine, child, jus' so long's y' didn't
Drink th' water . . ."
On her lap I place
The paper squares I smuggled
She smiles, lays her leathered hands upon them
And removes her feet from my carry-on



Kris Pelletier
Balsa Wood Sculpture

Passing Up Marital Bliss

by CoryAnne Harrigan

Oh, I want to be a spinster--
I can cross stitch by the mile;
I'm a whiz at tollhouse cookies;
I've a feeble old-maid smile

And a certain way of casting
Down my eyes in virgin fear.
Oh, please let me be a spinster--
I enjoy being severe!



The Itch
Cami Johnson
Photograph

Plastic Pillow Lips

by Andrea Hoover

I'm getting used to it here you know, and I almost like it. The last, oh, seven or eight months have zipped right by. Time flies when you're having fun, and all that sort of thing. The only problem now, see, is that, uh, even though they're always asking questions about this and that, they really don't have the slightest idea about what happened. At all. I mean, they--well, they would have--if I'd tell them, but they're being paid a whole heck of a lot of good money to figure me out, so it wouldn't help anybody for me to go and spoil their fun by making it too easy.

Mostly, though, they ask me why I shoved the Bic pen through my wrists. Dr. Leibowitz said he could see how I got it through one wrist, but he couldn't figure out how I'd managed to get it plum through two of them, like I did.

I can't remember exactly what started it. I mean, why I did it. Well, there's a lie, I know exactly why I did it. I did it because of an article I read in the paper about a boy who wanted readers to write a story for him saying why he shouldn't kill himself. What I figured, see, was that I should be the one to do it. Simple enough, I thought--if I could come up with the first line, right, telling him that life's worth living, it would lead to the second and third lines. And so on and so forth. Heck, with the first line down, I'd be half way there, pretty much. But then nothing happened.

What's also a lie is, uh, what I said in the beginning about being used to it and liking it here. I'm not and I don't. And I'm not having any fun, either. And the other lie, right, is uh, what I said about not telling them what happened. I did. I told them everything that happened. I sang just like one of those canaries so they must not've been listening properly. But, at the time all

I could think about was saving the boy.

You know--oh, I thought this was funny--the pen that I ended up, uh-- Well, when I was trying to write the story it was in my mouth, see, and I was giving myself a sort of pep talk and I bit down on it for emphasis, and it split open. Well, you know, there was red ink absolutely everywhere.

One thing I noticed though, was that the ink spurt . . . spurted . . . spurt . . . whatever, out onto my shirt, see, instead of, I don't know . . . seeping, I guess. It reminded me of-- See, the thing that always confuses me, even now, is, when you've got a vein that's been cut . . . a vein . . . or an artery, right, well, which is the one that . . . spurts, and which is the one that . . . seeps?

See, I know that one of them carries blood to the heart and one of them carries it away, I just don't know which one does which. So, I'm not sure if I was trying to predict the sort of blood flow I'd get, should I ever actually cut myself, or what. What I did know, though, was that it would make a heck of a lot of difference whether it was a vein or an artery that I slit. At that point, though, it wasn't as if I was going to slice anything open, it was just that I'd spent so many hours thinking about the boy.

Oh, and later on that night I was taking a bath, which I never do, right, because showers are so much cleaner, I guess, uh, than baths, where all you ever do anyway is sit in your own dirty water. I don't know, it just seems that it defeats the whole purpose of trying to get clean in the first place. But yeah, I was in the tub that night and I think I fell asleep. I must have, actually, because all of a sudden it sounded like there were fifteen people banging away at the door. Then my head slid off the plastic pillow lips, the one that took me something like three

hours to blow up. I couldn't get the rubber stopper to stay in the hole, right, and it wasn't the kind that automatically holds all the air you've just hyperventilated yourself to death, blowing into it.

Well, then the fifteen people banging on the door turned out to be my sister's babysitter who had to go to the bathroom, which is another thing I never understood. Why the heck did they always get a sitter when I was home all the time. I mean, well, granted, I'm not the most reliable person around, but at least I'm related.

But what I was saying--oh, about the boy in the paper--I wanted to know why he wanted to do it--kill himself--I mean, uh, why in the world he'd want to, you know, die before his time. Well, I called the lady at Dial-a-Prayer and asked her why anyone would want to die before his time, and she said that it can't be done, that it's not possible; that if someone dies, it's because it's time.

I can't believe they kept hiring a babysitter for my sister when I was at home and good to go. But like I said before, though, I read the article and the boy was pleading with me to find, uh, reasons for him to live and not just do away with it all. And I tried. I tried so hard that the veins and arteries bulged and stuck out of my wrists like thick roots, and all I could think of was "God is good, God is great, Let us thank Him for our food." And then a minute later, right dead in the middle of wanting to help him so badly, I saw a "Note to the Reader" from the Editor, and all of a sudden I felt my life fall apart. It was most peculiar.

It reminded me a lot of the time I switched the TV on and saw a news broadcaster with frazzled hair and smoke on her face, saying that the West Coast had just been blown to smithereens by one of those really lethal bombs that destroys absolutely everything.

I ran around in circles, crying, right, and then I called my friend in California even though evening rates weren't in effect. When nobody answered, I ran around in bigger circles and cried harder. Ended up, though, uh, that the new broadcast was nothing but a pilot for a new series that the station was trying out. Well it worked, because I'd really believed that my friend didn't answer the phone because he'd been melted in the explosion.

But, see, in "Note to the Reader," the Editor wrote a load of baloney about a prize-winning essay that, it turned out, was the article I'd just read and been so traumatized over. The boy had written it in his story-writing class. It wasn't real, and he wasn't on the brink of suicide. I guess that's when the writer's block really sort of got to me and I . . . well, it was as simple as that. Nothing fancy or complicated about it at all. I don't know, writer's block never usually got me quite so flustered--not like that anyway. And, see, that's one of the problems.

People here keep wanting to hear what happened and find out all about my wrists and--well, that in itself isn't really a problem, but they'd be disappointed in my explanation--about the "Note to the Reader"--see, because they must think that something really catastrophic happened; that I was weaned too early. Which I may have been, you can never tell.

But the way I saw it, I'd just spent hours trying to come up with a written message of--of hope, for some damn fake who'd just won some pansy essay-contest and got his name and, uh, prize-winning crap-for-story in the paper... I mean, I'd just spent half my life it seemed, trying to help the guy, and he turns out to be a fake. Which still doesn't explain why I punched the pen through my wrists the next day.

Dr. Leibowitz--the one who couldn't imagine how I'd jammed the pen straight through my--uh, well, he thinks I did it because I blamed my hands for the writer's block, which is garbage and I told him so. Even I know my brain had something to do with it--and I didn't go stabbing the Bic through my ear, or anything like that. It's just that, well, when you try to help someone because they've told you that they're in serious trouble, you don't want to rack your brains out trying to solve their problem and then have it turn out to be that they're only trying to win a damn contest.

I don't know why I shoved the pen through my--no, that's not true I do know why I shoved it through--I said all of this earlier. I did it to teach that silly boy a lesson. To show him that you can't just go around, uh, what's it called . . . crying wolf all over the place, tricking people all the time.

Well, anyway, at the hospital, after they got the pen out--before they brought me here--and after the transfusions, uh, the reporters asked why I'd done it, and I told them. I reminded them of the story in their newspaper and I told them to tell the boy that it was his fault, right, that he was the reason. I don't know if any of them ever got around to telling him because they don't let me see the papers in here. But I specifically said that I'd done it on account of the boy.

So now, the thing I can't figure out is why they keep saying, "Hey, why'd you really do it, huh?" I mean I know I change my mind--well, you'd just think they'd have it down pat in my files by now, along with the rest of the stuff I tell them. I don't know . . . it's really hard to say . . . I can't tell if it's the food or the horse-pills they give me, but I've been babbling a lot these days and my thoughts aren't nearly as straight as they used to be.



Perspectives
Mindy Culver
Salt Block

When I did it, when I poked the pen through I was thinking --for crying out loud, I don't even know this boy, and now look, I've got red ink al over my--but, see, it wasn't red ink, it was-- See, that was the thing that--well, so, somehow I had sense enough not to spend too much time checking whether I'd hit a vein or an artery, even though I told myself to look so I could ask someone about it later.

I don't know, it doesn't make that much of a difference what part of me I speared, or why I did it, or how the blood was coming out, but, you know, Dr. Leibowitz wasn't kidding. How in the world I got that pen through both my wrists, I'll never know--I probably had to--Jeeze, I must've had to--I guess I just... held the pen between my knees, pointed up and then I slammed down on it with the soft side of my wrist...but that's still just the first one and that doesn't explain how I got it through the second one,

because I remember that it hurt like a big dog...I guess I just kept pounding.

When the people came from 911--the babysitter called them--it was the first time on the job for the guy with the stretcher. I always wanted to be a paramedic and I tried to tell him about my favorite episode of "Emergency"--but he didn't listen because he was throwing up. I don't remember seeing him do it, but he told me about it later. He said that I sat there like a sheish kebab--bleeding to death with a Bic pen sticking out of both wrists. Apparently, he was fine, see, until he tried to take my pulse and realized he didn't have to tough me to get it, that all he had to do was watch the blood spurt out of my wrists. And that's when he threw up. I don't know, I'm just tired of the fuss they're still making about it, because I don't really think it was all that big of a deal.



The Viper

Mindy Culver

Balsa Wood Sculpture

Aunt Leigh: Episode One

by Whitney E. Hall

A brief story about a remarkable woman known to me as Aunt Leigh. One day Aunt Leigh was sitting in the park reading. A young man came up to her and they began chatting. One thing led to another, the chats became longer and more intimate, and from these inauspicious beginnings a lovely relationship was born. Leigh and her young swain Westley were very very happy, until that fateful day when Westley announced to Aunt Leigh that he was a woman living in a man's body, and

though he cared for her, he just could not continue to live a lie. And so he left. And Leigh was pissed. Because when Westley left he took with him her heart . . .

. . . and her pink angora sweater, and her Donna Karan dress, and her black handbag, and her pearl earrings, and her snakeskin heels that cost more than sane people should ever pay for shoes. And Leigh was alone, but had considerably more room in her closet.



Opposites Attract

Cami Johnson

Photograph



Geoff Wycoff
Photograph

The Wolf (and the Three Little Pigs)

by Mary Magner

Pigs and wolves have never really hit it off.

The Wolf was hungry
Desperately hungry
The last remains of a meager squirrel
Had grappled their way
Through his intestines
And his bowels demanded food,
Food, and more food.

Aroma of pig
Wafted on the soiled air
And Wolf's nose
Congested with the scent.
There was a flashcard
Of a ham steak
Channeled with sloppy fat
And Wolf's feet were trotting
After the smell.

A hay shack leaned
In a dying field
And it reeked of pork.
Wolf hesitated on the edge
Of the mud moat.
Muzzle hairs were sticky with drool.
His flea-happy hide
Rolled in flaps and furrows
Over his belly as he waded
To the crumbling grass door
Knock Knock
"Who's there?" -- A disgruntled squeal.
"Open the door and let me in."
"Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin."

I'll chinny chin chin you, thought Wolf,
Pink eyes narrowing. He yelped,
"Then I'll Huff and I'll Puff
And I'll blow this house in."
A torrent of air was exhumed --
Breath that reminded the hay
Of poisoned dirt and
Beetle excrement, and it caved in
On Piggy's head.

Piggy ran to Piglet
Who lived at 1201 Wood Ave.
In a twig hut fashionably unstable.
Prickled with bits of straw
Wolf tailed the porcine escapee.
He went through much the same routine
As before, but there seemed,
At least to the pigs cowering
Behind the percolating Mr. Coffee,
An added element of irritation
In Wolf's manner.

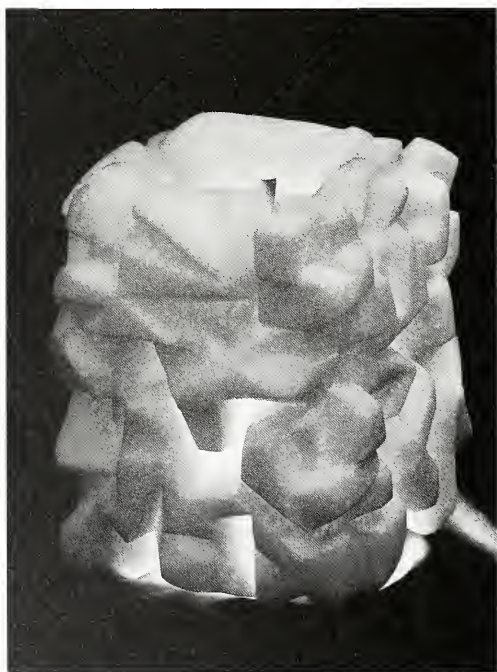
When Wolf stretched
His black rubbery lips and huffed
The waste products of his lungs at
The shaky twigs, they collapsed
In rancid memories of rotted robin eggs
And caterpillar funerals
That left green blood drying
In little flaky patches.

The swine sought asylum
With the boar of Hanover St.
Wolf followed them.
Small branches were twined
In his matted fur on his crown --
Imitation antlers that
Transformed him into Stag-Wolf
Young boys on bicycles
Threw pebbles at him and jeered
But his mind was on bacon,
Hamhocks, pork chops, and chitlins.

He felt some surprise at
The stately elegance of
The third pig's brick house.
He wondered, briefly, what
Pigs did for a living.
Then he knocked twice with
The brass lion knocker and went through
His short speech. Again,
The pigs made some reference
To chin whiskers, and Wolf
Felt compelled to blow.
But the inorganic walls
Held no memories and remained quiet.

Piqued and famished, he climbed
Up a gutter pipe onto the slate roof
And approached the chimney.
As he dangled one ragged foot
Over the lip of the stack, he heard
Mingled whisperings and scufflings
And scrapings. Wolf grinned,
Enjoying their fear, and made haste
To descend
A hot bath was waiting for him.

His hide was stripped of the rangy
Fur, and cured of dandruff and mites.
The boar wrapped bundles of steamed flesh
Into white butcher's paper.
When everything was efficiently packed
In a bonnie blue basket,
This little piggy went to market.



Steve Miller
Salt Block



The Worm
Mindy Culver
Salt Block

The Waistband of My Underwear

by Jennifer Dublin

Five minutes of continuous
nervous laughter
uncorks bottled tension
resulting in a rambling
rushing conversation
like a dam that
has just broken
and spills over
a tremendous force
then peters out
trickling down
like the sweat
that dribbles
down your back
meeting its end
in the waistband
of your underwear.

Silence.
A cocked eyebrow.
An inquiring look.
The sun beats down
on the dashboard.
His fingers
grip the wheel.
Damp hair mats his forehead.
A perplexed look
appears on his face.
Dust motes sparkle
in the light.

Sweat trickles
down my neck
slowly making its way
to the waistband
of my underwear.



Dark Still Life
Vittorio F. Colaizzi
Charcoal

Peugeot à Deux

by Dan Dervin

I love you, but you see
My vision filters through a windshield
That's badly cracked--

Moreover my motor has a private murmur
Buried beneath the hood
Among the mischievous turning parts that go
Stuttering in ticklish tongues

Through the crankshaft; my car you see is composed
Of too many foreign parts--
French design, English steering, Frankfort radio
That shouts down East European valves
With secrets inside the housing never to be told,
Such as 'passing' for a fearless Fiat in Prague--

My 'Fiat' skips through Praha like a Skoda
On vodka, incognito to border guards and Russian
Customs; indecisively poised, the radiator soars
To extremes on disarmament and re-armament alike.

My bag of bolts is a fierce old bus--
All its knocks boast it knows the knack
Of surviving by not being itself; but

Never mind, we'll be dancing on Baltic sands
When I get to Gdansk; we'll be singing
Of how we too change, how every wayside love
And loving detour suits our itinerary
Like the arrival of organ transplants to awaken
The wayward pilgrim's forgetful heart.

1990 Melchers Prize for Three-Dimensional Art



**Diana Faris
Balsa Wood Sculpture**

Your Hand, Please

by Nicola Mason

1990 Chandler Prize for Fiction

We know him as well as anyone I guess. His father raised the boy himself after the mother died. Never knew a thing about her that he'd remember. He couldn't have got the idea from her, and Agnes and I kiss little enough, we've been at it so long. Agnes with her plump, red face and stout body. No, she couldn't have put it in his head to do it either.

I know now we shouldn't have taken him in. We thought it was kindness at the time, and we had known the father. Besides, what else was he to do being ignorant. Granger never sent him to school, except when he had to. He was torn apart when his wife took sick and died. She was kind of fancy, a town woman, but she married him just the same. I guess he didn't want to be parted from the boy after that. He was afraid if he was educated he'd run off, and there'd be no one to keep the farm going. That's why we took him. I figured he could work my farm just as he'd done the father's. It was a kindness. He couldn't do anything else.

He must have learned it in town. I let him off Thursday nights, and he'd tear away in his father's battered blue pickup. We always thought he had friends there the way he seemed so eager, till one night Agnes went for groceries and saw him standing back in an alley just staring at people walking by. She told me she was near put off by the look on his face, sort of desperate and pained, like a mutt looking out from the pound knowing it won't be taken.

Agnes was bustling over to perk him up, but he saw her and darted away. She left him to himself. She's never one to mind another's business.

He must have seen something there, a couple maybe ducking away from the crowded street into his dark hiding place. He'd never known girls, you see. Probably he didn't know what it meant when he felt it, that impatient pressure. Then he saw those two, and it struck a chord. Girls were for kissing. That's what you did with them, he must've thought.

Sometimes I think we should have talked to the boy, told him the way of things, but I still don't think it was for us to say. We did give him a roof and good meals.

He was never one for talking anyway. Ten months it had been, and you could hardly get a word out of him but for "yes sir," "more corn," or "doing tobacco today."

At first Agnes thought it was the shock. "Seeing both parents dead's bound to scramble anyone's head, poor boy."

She made as a mother to him for a while, hoping to settle him in, but it worsened him I think, for not being used to woman's ways. It was strange to see his big, gray hands tremble when she leveled comforting eyes on him, or asked if he had slept well. At first he seemed puzzled with her, and in the house his eyes tracked her as if discovering a new species.

Then something changed. Maybe out on the farm with the animals he made some dull connection, Lord knows what, that formed his sense of female. He still watched her, but when she turned to him in softness, his eyes became stony, his face taut. Times he would ignore her completely, and though she never showed him, at night I felt her shudder beside me like a wounded bird.

It became a matter of pride to her then. She was well-liked in town for her pleasant company. Always someone was dropping by or stopping her in the street to talk. He'd have none of it though. The more she labored to please him, cooking his favorite dinners, sending lemonade to the fields at mid-day, putting the good feather pillows on his bed in the attic, the more spiteful he was. He would mumble if she spoke to him, barely touched his food, and she would find the pillows on the floor in the morning.

It was unnatural. I was sick through of the whole thing and told her she'd just better leave him be. She cried then and said, "Let me keep on, Abner. I'll get to him somehow."

It was one night at dinner she saw the truth of it. She leaned over to touch his hand after grace, and he jerked away as if she'd scalded him. For an instant his eyes crackled to her like electrical currents, carrying some dark emotion I couldn't interpret. But almost immediately he sank back into his chair and ducked away holding his hand from his body.

I couldn't stand by any longer. My chair fell back as I jumped to my feet and yelled, "This is ridiculous! You'll show some respect for my wife, boy, or take yourself somewhere else. Leave this house now and don't come back until you can act right!"

He might not have even heard me, just kept his face turned away and frowned hard like he was thinking on something he couldn't figure out. Then he jerked himself up like a mechanical man and walked outside. We heard the truck start up in a few minutes and roll down the drive.

It must have been that night he saw them kissing, because he eased after that. Maybe he got some comfort from watching that small act, thinking, that's all? Thinking he could be a part of that simpleness. Yes, it must have been some kind of relief. He even slept on Agnes' pillows, though she never gave him the time of day after that.

The next Friday we were laughing at the story in the paper when he came in for lunch. At the time I would have never guessed it of him, but that's how it is with most people, never thinking it could be someone you know. Now, though, I'm not surprised he did it. He had that sort of a way about him, that you could imagine him doing something queer, and not really catching on himself just how queer it was.

I remember how his head shot up from his shoulders when we started talking. He was surprised, I'm sure of it, like he couldn't believe we knew. Maybe he was surprised the girl told at all. Like I said, he had a strange idea of the way of things. He probably thought it was too private to tell of. He thought he was loving her, you know what I mean, that they were lovers!

"Imagine!" laughed Agnes, "A kissing-bandit in our town." She slapped her thigh.

"Comes all kinds," I said, grinning.

"What possessed him to run off, I wonder. Seems odd he took time to hide in the bushes to wait for the girl, then tore off like the squirrel that got the nut."

"Some farm boy probably doesn't know what the nut is yet," I answered. "Scared the pants off him kissing a pretty girl."

We were laughing so hard by then we never noticed how strained his face got. I must've come pretty close to the mark to get him so shook up. He leaped out of his chair and slammed his fists on the table so hard the dishes jumped.

His mouth was working up and down, and his throat too, to say something. Not a thing came out, though. He wasn't paying attention to us either, just staring ahead with his eyebrows scrunched close over his eyes giving him the blunt-nosed look of a beetle.

I couldn't say what crazy things went on in his head then. Maybe he thought we were jealous of his triumph, or that we were

only pretending to know more than him. Then again, he could have just been thinking of the girl and the fierce jolt that ran through him when he kissed her. Whatever it was, it was enough. He focused on us, and a sly smile slid onto his face, like he was thinking how sneaky we were, but we couldn't fool him!

"Course we didn't know what to think with him flying around banging on the furniture. Besides, he'd never shown us any violence. If anything I thought he was a little too timid. He always seemed to shrink a little when anyone turned eyes on him. So when it happened we were sort of stunned for a few minutes, watching him like we would a rusty stick suddenly turned into a copperhead.

"What's up with you, boy?" I said finally, hoping I could guess his mind.

He was calmly munching his ham sandwich again, smirking away.

"Nothing you ain't heard of, pops," he snickered, slapping his leg like Agnes had done.

"I don't know what's got into you," I told him, shaking my head, "but you remember your father's gone. You call me 'sir' cause that's a title of respect. If you've got no respect for us that gave you a home, there's no place for you here, got that?"

He chewed thoughtfully for a minute, then nodded and said, "Yep, you're right about that. He's gone alright." He stopped eating then, as if he couldn't do that and think at the same time. "He was funny, though, like you. All them rules for livin' he had, act proper and show respect and such."

"Your father was a good man. He knew what was right," I said, thinking to put some sense in his head, but he kept on like he didn't hear.

"Don't let me catch you getting wild with them young'uns in town," he imitated. "You'll get yourself in trouble, and I won't have nothing to do with it." He made his voice low and scratchy like Granger's when

he said it, and it gave me a chill how much it sounded like him. For a second it seemed the dead man was talking out of his mouth.

"A man should look out for himself," I stated, shaking off that feeling. "If you take on sensible and look out for trouble, you'll live a good life, and never have to call on anyone for help. That's pride, boy. That's being a man."

I knew it wasn't my duty to go preaching to him, but I felt better for it. Someone needed to make things clear with Granger gone.

"It ain't so," he declared, his chin jutting out at a hard angle. "All them rules count for nothing! I saw it when he fell. I was below the loft when he came tumbling. His neck broke easy, right there, like mine or anyone's. He should have been better than that. He made himself out as better." He was talking wildly, his eyes wide and unseeing.

"Don't speak poorly of the dead," I commanded, not sure that's what he was doing, just trying to make him stop.

He did, and turned a terrible look on me like he couldn't stand the sight. "I know what a man is," he said. "Nobody told me nothing, but I know now, and you can't keep me from it. Don't you be putting your rules on me now I know what it's about."

I had nothing to say to that. It was clear he had some strange idea in his head, but I wasn't in a place to tell him what to do, and I'm not the kind of man to turn him out, knowing he couldn't ever last thinking the way he did.

"You make no sense at all." It was Agnes who said it. I was surprised because she had all but given up trying to coax him to response. "You're no man though. That's sure. You're no man." Her eyes were steady on him.

I don't know what I expected from him, but it wasn't the look of fear he gave her. All those things I said rolled right off, but it was as if he couldn't shake her words,

as if she knew some special truth he hadn't any notion of. We never talked of it, but I can't help but wonder now, if maybe she had some idea of what was going on, intuition or some such thing, that let her see his weakness at that moment.

Maybe all along he had a little feeling that it was all wrong, but pushed it aside in the excitement of discovery. He probably didn't know how else to go about things being tucked away from the world like he was. Now that he'd had the chance to be out, he'd come to an answer, and fitted it to himself so well he was set on it. Probably if someone came up and told him straight out exactly how things were done, he'd shake his head and cling to his idea like a fierce new mother to her child.

That's just what he did, too. She might have hit a soft spot with her words, but he was too stubborn to take notice.

"You don't know anything," he whispered, looking into his plate. The meal was finished in silence.

The next week two girls got kissed. I should have guessed then just because of the silliness of it. It was Thursday night again, his night off; same place too, up at the girls' school on the far side of town. The dormitories there are set apart from the rest of the school, connected by hedged-in sidewalks.

I know from what I heard later that he waited in the bushes for the girl to come walking alone from studying or a night class, then jumped out and grabbed her to place a quick, hard kiss on her mouth before racing away.

I'm not sure what the girls thought. Probably it happened so fast they weren't sure what had hit them. They didn't scream, though, I'm sure. It would have scared him and shattered his calf-eyed notions.

To him that contact meant everything. It must have filled a lack in him that he never understood. I don't think it was just the girls, though he probably thought

that was the whole of it, but really it was the connection.

Why he felt he needed it so bad I don't know. I always liked to stick to myself, but then he was young and shut away on that farm all his life. It was Granger's fault, really. He should have never kept the boy off like that so he didn't know how to be natural. It must have thrilled him, though, to think he had finally made a place for himself.

I noticed the difference after that first time, though I didn't know the cause. He worked with more energy and began to hum when he thought no one was around.

It surprised me when I first heard it. No tune, really, just a set of unorganized notes, but it was a cheerful sound. I'd never heard anything like that come out of him before. He'd never do it if he knew I was there.

Somehow he'd come to think I was against him, and watched me out of the corners of his eyes when we were alone, as if he didn't trust not knowing where I was. But Agnes was the worst to him, I think. She was all he didn't know, so he skirted her like she was a sickness.

He must have felt his separateness but didn't look on it as his doing, but as sort of a secret you had to catch on to so you could join up. He was probably afraid we'd get wise to his ideas and show him wrong. I don't think he could have stood it going back again to nothing.

That second time it happened, there wasn't any mention in the paper. I guess the police wanted to hush it up because they knew his pattern. They couldn't stop the gossip, though. Friday I was fixing up this old cabinet when Agnes came in flushed and sharp-eyed.

"Guess what?" she said, breathless.

"What's that?" I asked, scraping the old varnish onto newspaper.

"He struck again." She settled herself in her chair and picked up her needle-

work.

"Who struck?" I had forgotten all about it.

"The kissing boy...up at the girls school." She hadn't taken a stitch, but was leaning forward in a tense, expectant way.

"Oh? Where'd you hear that?"

"Amanda Graybeal that owns the fabric store on Henneberry."

"Is it sure?"

"Her daughter is a junior there."

"Is that right," I said, chuckling. "Sounds like it's getting to be a real scandal. I bet he's got the girls in an uproar."

"It was last night. He hid in the bushes again."

"Not too bright." I went back to my scraping. "You'd think he'd have more sense, but then he was crazy enough to do it in the first place."

"They'll be waiting for him next time." She frowned into the fire.

"Who? The police?"

"Yes."

"I guess they will."

"Yes."

The next week went by normal. But I remember on Tuesday he cut his arm badly putting up barbed wire in the garden. I took him over to the house with it wrapped up in my jacket, but Agnes wouldn't look at it.

"Here," I said, pushing the bloody thing toward her. "Just take a peek and see what you can do."

"No." She wouldn't turn from the stove, but kept staring at the spice rack like deciding what to put in the chili was the most important thing in the world.

"Oh for chrissake Agnes, he's bleeding!" I yelled.

She snapped around like a school boy somebody picked a fight with. "He doesn't want me to touch him," she grated, and turned back to her cooking.

Then I realized how stiff he was. He

stood like a statue, staring over our head with his jaw set tight. When I let go of his arm, he walked back outside. I didn't see him the rest of the day, but the next morning he had a messy bandage around the arm.

Thursday came and he drove away after dinner. Agnes couldn't be still, but kept getting up and touching things around the room. She would look out the window for long minutes, tapping her teeth with her fingers.

"This place is a mess," she said crossly, straightening the pillows on the sofa.

It's fine," I said. "Settle down now."

She sighed heavily and picked up her needlework. We sat quietly for a while, but her fingers paused often and the rocker would stop, then she seemed to shake herself and go on again.

When the phone rang she didn't move, just kept sewing calmly and steadily.

"Wanna get that?" she asked, glancing up at me.

"Yep," I grunted, pushing myself up and laying my book aside. "Hello."

She rocked back and forth gently, pulling the needle up and sinking it into the fabric again.

"Yes, we'll come." I hung up and looked at her. "It's him. He's at the jail."

She nodded and went to fetch her coat.

I don't know why it didn't come as more of a surprise to me, except, like I said, he always seemed to be the type you'd expect to do something queer. It was like it all snapped into place when the officer started talking, and I knew what he would say before he said it.

He told me there was no doubt. They caught him with his hands on the girl. She had been set up as a decoy with seven officers hidden all around. She said don't be shocked, but he'd tried to run and they'd had to take him down. Then he went crazy when the girl spit on him. She was a silly

thing, the officer said. He'd refused the call, but the officer convinced him to give our names.

They led us right to him after we'd signed the release papers. It was a big cell, and there were a few others there too, drunks and crazy boyfriends. He was sitting alone near one corner with his hands on his knees and his face turned to the wall. When the officer barked out his name, he got up and walked, almost eagerly, to us. His face was swollen and yellowish, and his eyes were dilated, as if locked onto some frozen scene.

I imagine now what he was seeing, just as his eager lips touched hers, the sudden bright lights exposing their hid-away; the men yelling and lurching at him from the shadows; the girl's face, tight in the light as she puckered to spit on his pinned body.

I see it all now, but then I was angry. I felt he had shamed me, though he wasn't even my own. I had given him my home and

he had shown nothing but scorn to us.

When he finally raised his eyes to mine, I turned away, my face set. Not a word was spoken on the drive home. He sat wedged between us in the truck and I imagined him straining inward and upward to escape that contact.

When we pulled up to the house, he climbed out like he had aged fifty years. I watched him, thinking he'd gotten beat up good, hoping they knocked some sense in his head while they were at it. I didn't think to look at Agnes, so I didn't know till later, after we found him on the floor of the barn below the loft. It was then she cried.

"What?" I asked.

"He touched me last night." She covered her face with her palms. "He put his hand on my arm in the truck."

"What'd you do?" I felt my own throat tighten up.

"I pushed it away."

1990 Melchers Prize for Two-Dimensional Art



Bryan Higgins
Photograph

Bathroom Reflections

by Suzanne Henry

1990 Chandler Prize for Poetry

When the ceiling caved in through
the first floor bathroom, dozens
of rusted double-edged razor blades
clinked in the bathtub.
I stood there in awe,
towel in one hand,
soap in the other,
and thought about miracles.

Upstairs everything seemed okay.
Leafy vines of flowers running
along small squares of white tile
were still in place, but the area
around the porcelain
claw-footed tub had
some of the vines growing underground
looking for new places to take root.

Leaning closer, looking for any
explanation as to what had happened,
I see a dampened curled corner and
grab hold, peeling back the vine
to find speckled green and yellow tile
looking suspiciously like a
seventies-inspired
bathroom interior decoration.

Kneeling now, tracing the damp
edges, fingernails scratching
where other hands once rested,
searching for a way to reveal
(more tile) the cause of the
fallen razor blades.

I go to get a flashlight
and pick away the top layer
surrounding the tub's feet.
I go again to get a knife,
sliding it along the green specks

ripping out the rotting tile and
find yet another layer.
“This is better than old wallpaper,”
I say, and shine the light
on more green tile, only this stuff has
yellow Dresden-dish sized
flowers that have not seen
the sun in a decade or so.
Could it be from the sixties?

I marvel--can there be more?
Why so many styles?
Linoleum, Congoleum, ceramic, and wax-free.
The house was only built in the fifties,
and we have only lived here
two years.

I try one last time with the knife
and scrape wood;
wood rotting from leaking showers
where soap and water feed the vines and
go through the specks to
drown yellow daisies
covering a crack
just big enough to drop a blade through
so it lands on the plaster
just above the next shower;
soft wood I can put my
fist through, and not get hurt
by doing so.

I shine the light into
the dark abyss deposit and catch
glimmers of once-useful razor blades
resting in the bathtub below.



Linda DiLorenzo
Photograph

Philly . . .

by Helen H. Thompson

I been called everything, so I s'pose I ain't got no name no more. They says I got it down good, 'specially 'round midnight. Well that's them for ya, cos I don't know myself. I know somethings, though, like Dirty Dixie up and down, it's cool. Yeah, Dixie and me, she's like my partner in crime, my soul, well we pulls some mighty crowds there under City Hall, 'specially how when summertime brings them tourists with their cameras and all. I dunno why theys gotsto bring their pollutics and that to my corner, but theys talks to me about everything. Man, I left D. C. to get away from that Bull! Well, I s'pose they hopes to see old Ben rise from the grave, with all theys gots to go see where he was. Or like another crack split right down that bell in half. Jeez, man, I ain't nothing with those historical things, hell, theys all got money and gives it to save museums, well I got my own museum right here--Miss Dixie. She and me just work on the streets here every night. We're perfect as one soul. Yeah, I laugh cos I only gots her as my true love, all I need, you know? Naw, she ain't no whore, she made of brass shined up like

gold, like the sun. And when she sing, damn if I ain't got the whole world lookin up at me smilin' like, cos I be the cool wind that carries her voice up like so. And them tourists toss them coins and be making dumb jokes sometimes, like today one guy who says that about sax, well, yeah I knows about hell's disease so, you know, it's stupid. Then theys grab tight to their purses and their cameras, like they're heavy-like, and flash their smiles that say, glad I ain't you. I knows something they don't, though, makes me happiest man I know, yeah, and richest, too. I ain't alone out here, we be like one big happy family. We ain't got houses or cars or big words, or even names. But all the kids, they come and climb all over that "Scaffolding" stuff they done put up by City Hall just to beg Dirty Dixie to sing them night-night stories. They don't gots no coins to throw like them tourists, but what they got they gives me, and thats their dirty faces smiling big at me. Themsgives me joy like no coin did, them that feels Dixie's swingin' stories sure 'nough as they were her heart.

The Sanctity of Blackberry Picking

by CoryAnne Harrigan

That Sunday in August the air was close
and hot enough to soak our tee shirts through
and stick the hair to our necks and faces.
We climbed far up from the stagnant lake,
going higher and farther through crowds of locust trees,
through clearings where the tributaries
let water wash over quartz and red clay.
And then they were everywhere--
blackberry bushes.

We picked two gallons worth; the bushes were generous
once we'd found them. The berries were ripe and warm,
almost too soft to pick after hanging in sunlight
for hours. Your fingers purpled, my wrists and ankles reddened
from thorn scratches as we gathered the red-black fruits.
As the day turned older, we both took on the scent
of earth, of honeysuckle and goldenrod.

Heading back sticky and listless,
we stopped to wash at the widest tributary.
You pulled back your dark hair and twisted it
into a braid while I knelt to splash my face and arms
at the bank. Perfection was easy,
and we kept still for a moment to feel it blow over us
as a breeze off the water,
both of us silent, both of us breathing it in.

I remember afterwards thinking
only of all I could then see:
water gleaming over the quartz pieces;
a small sassafras leaning toward the stream;
dust on my sandal straps;
you taking a large blackberry on your tongue,
holding it there like the Host,
smiling as you tasted our day in its juice.



Reflections I
Stacey L. Scott
Photograph

Leningrad 1942

by Sean M. Dargan

1.

A child runs screaming
into the arms of its
mother, oblivious to
the whistle of bullets
above and beside their
bodies. Warmth means
safety and warmth comes
only from her dark shape.
The wall behind them is
ripped away by a
sleeting sheet of lead
droplets as the child
burrows deeper into its
refuge.

2.

Fire at night brings
light to the eyes of the
irregulars, dug deep
in the rubble of earlier
shellings. They check
their clips and wait for
the new offensive. One
nervous finger scrapes
madly at a rifle's rusty
breech plate. The old,
knowing hand next door
rests upon the nervous
shoulder imparting the
message: We all are
scared.

3.

Two diseased dogs fight
over a scrap of fresh
meat lying in the gutter
beside a bayonet. The
larger digs its fang
into the smaller's neck,
drawing blood, forcing

surrender of the life-sustaining prize. The victor trots sluggishly into the street, around the corner and straight into a rolling Panzer.

4.

Rattling jars on the shelves of the corner drug store confirm the current onslaught. A brimming bottle of ether drops to the floor; glass shards ambush the store's defending tabby, followed by a low, opaque cloud of vaporal calvary.

5.

That sound--the sound like a train--is all you hear at first. Then closer, the slap of the tracks around the wheels, and the rattle of the plates on the rollers. The tanks come slowly, methodically; they roll up and over their path like titans. Then they stop, rotate their turrets and speak with the voice of God.

6.

Through a grimy, steel slit the gunner peers from his world. He shoves a greased, brass shell into the breech of his 88mm whore; his once-hale fingers have become bruised and cut in the

two short weeks since the
loader was killed. The
turret rings with motion
as he adds one degree
elevation to the barrel.
Depression--and the tank
springs to life; casings
fly from the sides of its
mouth and fall like silt
on the soft ground.

7.

Down the murky lane,
beside a toppled white
granite greek inches the
angled steel shape; well
within its range now, it
pauses to gulp one last
breath of air. As light
forsakes sound, so the
fire leaps from the
barrel, heralding and
splitting cold grey,
moments before the blast
affirms and deafens,
moments before the shell
arrives and destroys.



Sean David Carpenter
Stoneware

Fresh bodies fill stale
cracks in the streets.
Within seconds the
vibrant scene is covered
with new rubble, dusted
in a fine grey. The
steel thunder has rolled
farther down the front
and left in its wake a
brine of ruin: A wounded
young man holds his head
and strokes a lifeless
cat; a veteran, crushed
beneath a fallen beam,
surrenders his rosary to
the world; and a little
girl with wide, white
eyes grips her mother's
frame, already two hours
cold.





Bert
Stacey L. Scott
Marble Sculpture

Untitled #2

by Maggie Bassen

Concentrate,
that's what the book says.
The whole secret to it
is applying the proper concentration.
When you walk
naked, in the garden
under a full moon in spring
and plant the earth from his footprint under a willow tree
concentrate.
When you prepare a stew
for a lover you want to enchant,
adding pieces of yourself--
blood, nails, hair--
really focus on him,
on his image in your mind's eye.
Pierce the skin over your heart
and write his name in blood
on a square of white silk--
but it will only bring him to you
if your mind's image of him is razor sharp.
So, really
if you just want something badly enough,
it will be yours.
It's that simple.



Stacey L. Scott
Stoneware

window sill

by Joseph Micheal Romero

when i talk
the water in my breath
rushes past you,
spilling on the window,
beading like rain on the hood of a new sedan
except it's sideways
and i can sorta see through it.

sometimes
if i don't feel like
talking anymore
i climb on in
and go for a long ride
in the rivulets
i made with all my gabbling.

i never go anywhere too special --
i'm just driving south
looking for a place to park.



Only

Bryan Higgins
Photograph



Stephen T. Miller
Acrylic

Ruins

by Julie Antolick

You say I am a flower, tempting me to blush
as I think of the soft dampness of petals,
of yielding to the sweet triteness of a bloom.
I do not know the intricacies of subtle pressures,
so I know you wait for my words
to rise around me like weeds
and wrap me in supple, coarse vines,
coaxing me down until I am covered
like the flower
or like the ruins you showed me on that autumn day,
when the sun shimmered off the leaves in the trees,
and the leaves already fallen
circled each other in a running dance;
then I did not mind so much,
being covered beneath the shade.



Geoff Wycoff
Photograph

From the Open Window

by Dirk Bender

Jeffrey sat with his back to the open window where outside, electric sawing of the neighboring mill droned into his ears and another knock resonated on the door. The same three anxious, apprehensive knocks as last Sunday. And if he could see the severe figure behind the porch door he would be aware of the two less accessible figures flanking him.

At first his father didn't answer. Of course the figures had no other interest than in his father's repentance. He owed them. So his father soon shuffled out of the bedroom, crossing to the door with his bottle dangling at his side like a gun that he often shot through his teeth. His eyes were not clouded by the alcohol but by the repetition of dust filled days at the mill, working under the weighted stares from the other workers with that of a martyr's unconscious modesty. Each admired his father's act of silent revolt. There lay an unspoken understanding of pain as motivation, humming through the resonant fiber of each soul.

Another report; three swift soundings of flesh on enforced plywood, as if nailing into it.

"I'm 'ere. Just a minute with ya."

He glanced at Jeffrey only once as he leaned toward the door. His hand, as it reached for the knob, hesitated not from fear but in majestic affirmation of the accepted struggle he now transmitted to his son. Their visual awareness hummed louder than any words could utter. However, Jeffrey forced his throat to gasp before stifling it into submission.

The latches came undone. The first, second, then third sullen figure burst into the room. Jeffrey watched from the chair in front of the open window at the three shapes surrounding his father at a formal

distance. And his father, with bottle held over his lean frame, slowly shook his head, eyes darting from figure to figure. Their boots grated upon the sawdust that caked the floor. Then, while his father glanced aside one figure threw a fist into his father's jaw. His father stood for an instant in meditation as if the figure possessed no physical form until the fist struck his cheek. Then they rushed at his father; the four struggling, passionately intertwined. Three on one. Then two crossed to the bedroom, while one held the bottle over his father's head then let it fall. As it shattered, the shards scattered across the floor like thorns. Then one, two, three left, slamming the porch door.

Soon Jeffrey heard his father spitting. Then the cussing. The saw drone filled the emptied silence with callous persistence. Then his father managed to his feet. Clutching his right leg, he shuffled across the room toward his son.

Jeffrey sat as he always had; straight-backed against the open window, full faced to his father's battered eyes. His feet dangled off the squeaking chair, one leg rocking in nervous anticipation. Hands on knees. Then the punches came with expected frustration. One, two, three. He felt that his face puffed in embarrassing intervals. Still, he watched the disdain rise to the surface of his father's face, course through his wrinkled brow, resolving in his clenched teeth. "Go wash up." Jeffrey went to the tiny bathroom.

Then a dog lived with them for a time. The spastic, long-haired spaniel grazed around the house like a sheep with no shepherd. Though the three figures delivered it with a clear warning, they never came to check on it. Yet they would come for

the money. The knock. The latch. The shuffling the shouting the slamming. But soon the dog would run into the bedroom, out of Jeffrey's view. His father would shuffle through the bedroom threshold, holding his thigh. Then the soft thud on matted fur. Another. Another and it would be over. And Jeffrey in the squeaking chair, back to the open window, no longer rocked his leg.

After two months, Jeffrey's face healed completely. He could punch it himself when he felt like it. During those two months the dog developed a passive tolerance to its punishment. His father seemed to strike at this conviction while the dog crawled deeper into its resolution. Jeffrey hadn't seen it for three weeks now. But still when the men came, then left, his father walked to the bedroom. The dog yelped as the saw droned from the open window with irrational patience into the boy's ears.

Then Jeffrey stood.

He walked slowly to the bedroom entrance. The half open door swung wide to his gentle nudge. Inside the dim, rose tinted room slept his father, face up, on wrinkled sheets; one arm hung off the

mattress, hovering near his bottle on the floor. From under the bed the reflecting eyes of the sheepish dog stared at him with painful longing. As Jeffrey walked toward the bed, the red curtain blew in the August breeze, and the electric saw started up outside. Jeffrey knelt by his father's side. He reached out to his father's hand and picked up the bottle. For a moment he let it dangle by his side, then deliberately raised it above his waist, his shoulder, his head as the buzz drowned out the soft splashing of liquor on the hard wood floor. His other hand rose up to cover the first around the bottle's neck. From the side of the bed, his father's bruised face and thin beard provoked a resented liking to his nemesis. Sweat clung to his scarred forehead in the angelic suffering of one who had wrestled with Providence and, through idiotic perseverance, was afforded the rejection of acceptance. Yet beneath his beaten profile dwelled an insurmountable defiance that failed to recognize the struggle as a gracious allowance but, instead, as his divinity.

The buzzing cut out as Jeffrey threw the bottle, side-armed, under the bed at the sheepish crimson eyes.



Fall '89 Shift
Vittorio F. Colaizzi
Charcoal

Errand

by Sadie (Stacy) Warner

i am only five
and my momma sends me
to the neighbor's
to buy the box at
the garage sale

i am skipping down the sidewalk
kicking at the cracks
gripping damp dollars in my hand
there's bumping behind me now

i turn around and see
the sidewalk first
where there's bike tires
nubby rubber pushing cement
connected to banana seats
straddled by
(not so little)
boys

they ride close
and get big
and my head swings back
to look at the sky ruffled with leaves
when they knock me down

giants, that's what they are
faces with smeary freckles
mouths full of jagged teeth
that are real close to mine
i want my momma here

questions questions
turn into
invading fingers
looking for a secret place
under my dress

i can feel hands on me
and remember that i forgot to
put on my underpants
now there's nothing to hide me down there

hand pushing on my head makes my
cheek scrape the sidewalk
i just skipped on
i am looking for anyone to help

i scream, but no one screams back
i think of the movie we saw
in Miss Parker's class,
the one about the seeing eye dogs the German
Shepards and i think i can be a
German Shepard too
so i

bite
one of the big boy's hands
until i can't bite any harder (it tastes salty)
and he jumps up and
grabs his friend
and they leave but first they
kick

sneaker tips
sinking into my side
more times than i counted
sneaker marks left
(i bet i'll have a bruise)

and then they
run
and i'm a ball on the
ground
until my daddy comes to
scoop me up
and take me home



Kicki Masthem
Stoneware



Sean David Carpenter
Stoneware



Diana Faris
Stoneware



Kicki Masthem
White Stoneware

Slug Burning

by Nicola Mason

It was dark when we found it on the porch step,
Distending with slow ripples, a leisurely traveler
The sudden glistening object of our cylindrical spotlight.

It was a large old slug,
Bloated with rich fatty tissues.
So innocent in its opulence we couldn't wait
To destroy it.

Katie scrambled inside for the salt
While I poked at its feelers.
They cringed, little eyes of my soft-bodied victim,
Retracting telescopes, focusing protectively inward
To those globular juices,
A stoic removal from the horror of act.

But we couldn't let it die ingloriously,
Dissolving to sticky jelly beneath a salty hummock,
The standard end for average slugs,

So we doused it with cooking sherry,
And lit the grainy pyre,
Seeing our placid warrior
Honored at last,
A flaming ship pushed out to sea.

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